

Midwifery

A Dissertation  
on

Amnion-rhoea

by David Kirkpatrick

~~of the University of Pennsylvania~~

of Penn<sup>a</sup>

1818

David M. Kirkpatrick  
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No embarrassment is more sensibly felt by the student of medicine than that called into existence at the particular time when he is about to offer himself at the altar of medical science for adoption of one of its children; when he is about to undertake a task so arduous or of some ~~im~~possibility so great as that connected with the practice of medicine.

When it is considered that the inexperience of the medical student must be a very perplexing obstacle to his first essay on a medical subject, and when it is well known that in making the attempt his object is of the first importance to himself and for the attainment of which he feels the utmost anxiety and solicitude; it is then no wonder that he ventures to pay his first tribute to science with diffidence, that he hesitates to usher his infantile production before a learned and venerable faculty.

But an honourable enthusiasm in the cause,

It is the opinion of the committee that the  
present state of the country is such that  
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in which he has enlisted preponderately, and a  
parent desire to become instrumental, even in  
the smallest degree, in mitigating the miseries  
of fallen human nature urges him to the dis-  
charge of an arduous task and reconciles  
his feelings to the unkind situation in which  
he appears as an author.

Under such impressions the following essay is  
most respectfully submitted.

"Et minutus pars principalis, quo totum corpus  
facile in consensum trahit."

*Amenorrhœa.*

The menstrual action is liable to derangement  
and disease alike with other functions of the  
human system; and the importance of its  
healthy state in the female economy is at  
once recognized by the necessary and imme-  
diate inquiries which a judicious physician  
will always make with regard to the regu-

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larity of this secretion, when called to the  
 aid of a female labouring under dis-  
 ease. A correct knowledge of this kind is  
 very essential in regulating our curative  
 indications. Indeed so important is the heal-  
 thy action of the uterus to the existence of a  
 similar state throughout the system that we  
 have been emphatically directed by a person  
 who has contributed not a little to the im-  
 provement of medical science <sup>to</sup> never to lose sight  
 of the Catamenia in women.

In the nosological arrangement of Doct<sup>r</sup> Cullen  
 Amenorrhoea is placed in his class Locales and  
 in the order Epizoeosis.

According to the strict etymology of the word  
 this disease may be defined a privation or  
 absence of the menstrual discharge. By  
 authors it is divided into two kinds my men-  
 tion and suppression of the menses. By the  
 former is meant that species of Amenorrhoea

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in which the catamenial discharge has not yet made its appearance, that period of life having arrived at which it usually occurs. By the latter is understood that state of the disease in which this flux after having been established and continued for some time becomes suppressed, unattended by pregnancy. In each kind obvious disease exists in the system either in the relation of cause or effect.

Retention of the menses

On account of the great irregularity as to the age at which females begin to menstruate in different climates and also under different circumstances in the same climate it may be remarked that the non-appearance of the catamenia at a particular age is not to be considered as any evidence of the existence of this disease. It is only when to this circumstance there are superadded certain morbid symptoms that we are to infer the presence of this

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species of Amenorrhoea.

This disease is supposed by some to be owing to general debility or want of vigor in the system. It is no doubt not unreasonable & favorable to malformation of the organs of generation or deficiency or disease of the crania.

The symptoms attendant on retention of the menses are a sense of debility, lassitude, sluggishness, dislike to motion, fatigue on the least exercise, dyspepsia, a leucophlegmatic countenance, depravity of appetite increased by a great desire for chalk, eructs, &c. costiveness, flatulency and acidity in the stomach and bowels, dyspnoea, palpitation of the heart, redness, swelling of the feet, a pale and flaccid state of the whole body, together with pains in the back, hips and loins. The pulse is small and quick. As the disease advances a livid circle is said to surround the eye and the face assumes a yellowish hue. This constitutes what has been called

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obscure, and it is not that is usual  
at this disease is attended with symptoms of debi-  
lity, yet I believe that it sometimes occurs ac-  
companied with indications of fulsis and  
plethora mixed by flushings of the counte-  
nances, pains in the head and breast.

This circumstance is evidently of some import-  
ance in its practical application to the treat-  
ment of this form of Hemorrhoid.

When from the symptoms just enumerated we  
are told the existence of any unusual de-  
gree of excitement, our remedies are parti-  
cularly obvious. Bloodletting in propor-  
tion to the urgency of the case must be re-  
sorted to. Next to this purgative medicines  
demand our attention as well to operate con-  
tinually on the bowels as to produce depletion.  
Perhaps the latter remedy, if used to a sufficient  
extent might frequently supersede the necessity  
of bloodletting in the present instance.

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If however symptoms of debility are present (and such is generally the case) a more extensive treatment the reverse of that which has just been mentioned, must be pursued. Having premised an emetic and cathartic, means are for the evacuation of the stomach and bowels and by which these organs are rendered more susceptible of the impression of subsequent remedies it is proper to exhibit tonic medicines of the mineral as well as of the vegetable kind. Of the former the preparations of iron have been administered, the preference being in most cases given to the carbonate or rust of that metal. Chalybeate preparations and the mineral, tincture of iron have been recommended as particularly beneficial. The peruvian bark and other vegetable bitters may be used. A nourishing diet of easy digestion is proper and also exercise should be taken daily in

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such manner as to avoid fatigue. Divine pursuits and agreeable company has been recommended as productive of advantage in this disease. The double use of the hot salt water bath is advised by M<sup>r</sup> Burns in preference to the cold bath in chlorosis, the latter being in his opinion injurious. Frictions with warm flannel should succeed the use of the warm bath.

A practitioner of no slender reputation or merit in medicine viz, Koeler Hamilton of Edinburgh, has very strongly recommended the use of purgatives alone in retention of the menses or chlorosis under the impression that this disease is to be referred to a deranged state of the primæ viæ. In order to obtain the greatest benefit from them or be successful in their use he advises the purgative mode of treatment to be vigorously employed for a considerable length of time. The seldom occurrence of this

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disease and the want of experience that sound criterion of correct practice renders me unable to bear any testimony either for or against the practice. However, without being obliged to adopt the pathology of Doct<sup>r</sup> Hamilton as correct or to place implicit confidence in it as explaining, in a satisfactory manner the cause of this form of Mithridatism I think we may very readily conceive of the propriety of using cathartic medicines in this or any other disease attended with a constipated or torpid state of the intestinal canal. But it is highly probable that the modus operandi of this class of medicines is not confined merely to the evacuation of the contents of the tube through which they pass. They exert a stimulant action and some of them have that action directed to a particular part of the intestinal tube. Hence we may easily imagine that a stimulant operation produced on the intestinal canal can

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be communicated by sympathy to the uterus and excite that viscus to healthy action and thus to the means of selecting such evacuations as operate on the rectum.

Marriage has been proposed as a remedy in this disease and I believe it has been successful.

#### Retention of the Menstrua.

This species of Amenorrhoea has already been defined. By some writers it has been supposed to be a symptomatic or secondary disease, and Mr Burns has attributed it very generally to such diseases as tend greatly to weaken the patient. It may be produced by causes which operate during the flow of the menses, such as cold and passion of the mind. I have known a very obstinate case of this disease from the conjoint operation of both these causes.

Suppression like retention of the menses appears under two different states of the system and may might not improperly be divided into acute

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and chronic or rather as it occurs accompanied with symptoms of inflammatory action or with those of debility. The former state is marked by a frequent, hard pulse, flushings of the face, hot skin, pain in the head back and loins, accompanied with costiveness and dyspnoea. The latter is here very evident and is characterised by various hemorrhages, even different parts and infrequently takes place.

In this state of the system it is essentially necessary to call in the aid of depleting remedies. Bloodletting is here advisable and its extent must be regulated by the circumstances of the case. Purgatives are also to be used. The sericium must be combined with the latter remedy particularly if the action is marking some effort for the restoration of the menstrual discharge.

When however this state assumes a chronic form or when the disease occurs in persons of a lax

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and debilitated habit, symptoms somewhat similar to those of retention of the menses are observed to take place. The treatment here must commence with an emetic and the case subsequently is to be managed by tonics. Cathartic medicines are also indicated and should not be neglected.

In a former American Medical Chap. Mann thinks he has found purgatives useful and he prescribes a combination of aloes and castor oil in these cases.

I have witnessed in suppression of the menses attended with considerable debility the happiest result from the use of the carbonate of iron continued for some time in conjunction with the daily use of the cold salt water bath, together with frequent exercise in horseback. The warm bath is resorted to at each monthly period particularly when there was any menstrual effort in the system. It was contin.

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and for an hour at each time. - Here electricity has been recommended. It is to be passed through the region of the uterus.

Blister applied to contiguous parts has also been advised as exceedingly useful.

It is frequently deemed necessary in the treatment of Amenorrhoea, to call in the aid of those medicines called emmenagogues. Most writers on the materia medica have considered these as very uncertain remedies. Various articles under this head have been used at different times, but as the limits of this paper preclude anything very minute on this subject I shall only mention some of those substances which have been supposed beneficial in Amenorrhoea.

To Doctor Harbottle has been ascribed the introduction of the Pilyala Senega in the treatment of this disease. One of our worthy medical teachers has justly been attri-

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buld the credit of testing its virtues and sub-  
 joining it into general practice. Root Chapman  
 has communicated, in the second volume of the  
 Eclectic register, information of great im-  
 portance on this interesting article. He tells  
 the decoction of the pelagale is the preparation  
 on which is exhibited and is made by pour-  
 ing a pint of boiling water on an ounce of  
 the bruised root and simmering it until re-  
 duced to one third. Of this, four ounces are  
 to be given during the day. But when the sym-  
 tom is making an effort for her relief, the  
 senega is to be pushed as far as the stomach  
 will bear. Doctor Chapman has had great suc-  
 cesses every hour. A suspension of the men-  
 strue is directed during the interval of  
 the menstrual period, for a net or too as  
 its constant use would produce nausea and  
 disgust. The addition of an anesthetic im-  
 proving the decoction renders it more palatable

[illegible]

ble. We are further directed in the use of this article to pay attention to the general system, obviating excessive excitement, or debility by suitable remedies.

I am a slender experimenter of cases in which the polygala has been used. I am prepared to express a great deal of confidence in this remedy, in the treatment of Anorexia Nervosa. And from what has been executed, by this medicine in the hands of others, I am induced to anticipate favourable results from its use.

The Root - Sarsaparilla, black hellebore and purgatives have been severally used, and from the above authorities on which they come recommended they can be so used but that they were amongst important resources to the practitioner in the treatment of diseased assimilation.

I have lately been assured of a case successfully treated by the use of the tincture of Cantharides alone. Although the remedies now detailed are such,

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as are generally used with advantage in the  
 morbid; yet it unfortunately occurs that we  
 must be prepared to meet with even ~~some~~ dropsy  
 imminent and in some cases to be poised in an  
 attempt to overcome the disease by our whole  
 train of medicines. Whether this can be attrib-  
 uted to our limited or incorrect knowledge of the  
 cause of the disease I am entirely unable to say.  
 However I am much inclined to believe that a  
 morbid action has too often been considered as  
 a symptomatic or secondary affection. As  
 general debility is so frequently present in this  
 case, it has been referred to that as the foun-  
 tain from whence it flows, as the main spring  
 which excites it into action. That this disease  
 may sometimes be produced or influenced by pre-  
 vious or existing disease of the system, cannot  
 I think be questioned, but I am of opinion that  
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 an idiopathic action, to which as a cause may

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be noted all the concomitant disease of the system. We are informed that from the dissection of those who have died affected with retention or suppression of the menses the ovaries have been found diseased in a diseased state. From this circumstance, connected to the fact that the removal of these bodies has put a complete stop to the menstrual secretion of whom a well attested instance may be found in the surgical notes of the celebrated Mr. Holt) may we not justly infer that there is connected some important part in the process of menstruation, and that our pathological views have not hitherto been sufficiently extensive.

The ingenious and learned Koster Gullen has aware of the important connexion existing between the ovaries and menstrual process, when he gave it as his opinion that retention of the menses was referable to a certain state of the ovaries. I am further induced to believe that Amenorrhoea is mostly a primary disease on

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the authority of the late venerable Doctor Rush who declared that the uterus when relaxed gave origin to a major part of the diseases of females whether of the acute or chronic kind. He considered suppuration of the uterus as production of disease of a highly inflammatory nature. This opinion was founded on the broad base of extensive experience; and such was the language of a man whose heavy looks bespoke a life long resided in the practice of his profession; whose arm had often been extended to rescue the weak female from the ravages of disease and snatch her from the dreadful grasp of death, and whose precepts on this point should command the greatest respect.

No less favourable to my ideas of the idiopathic nature of this disease is the expression of one of our medical teachers that there is not a disease which afflicts females which is not accompanied by inflammation, not to say more? of some men, at one time or another, primarily located

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-ted in the stomach; if this be allowed as the  
 centre of the disease and the point from which  
 it extends throughout the system, producing  
 symptoms so malignant and various, symp-  
 toms which cannot be accounted for except  
 on the doctrine of sympathy: may we not then  
 be permitted to conjecture that in amenorrhoea  
 the ovaries by the exertion of some peculiar con-  
 nexion with the uterus are the primary and  
 efficient link in the chain of disease attendant  
 on a morbid state of the catamenia? Are we not  
 induced to believe that here the disease sits, enthu-  
 red in hideous majesty, that this is the centre  
 of morbid action, this the spot from which the  
 diseased impetus radiates?

It is even a matter of some doubt whether amen-  
 orrhoea is not occasionally a cause of mania  
 in females evincing here its primary nature.  
 To this opinion I am led by the important paper  
 to which I have already referred. Indeed so  
 strong and forcible is the language of Doct.

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Chapman on that subject that I am induced to quote his own words. After detailing some cases he goes on to say that "They do not conclusively prove that *menstruatio* is sometimes a cause of insanity, they at least are calculated to awaken our suspicions upon the subject. This is his aim. They show distinctly the relation between the two diseases and demonstrate in the most striking manner how essential it is in treating the affections of the mind to have a constant and vigilant eye directed to the uterine function. They prove irrefragably that in some cases of mania in women a cure may be effected when other means have totally failed, by simply producing an effusion of the menses."

From *phthisis pulmonum* that gigantic and inevitable disease which carries terror with its name has been cured in a Scotch woman in a paper inserted in the *Politic*

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reporting, as an effect arising in some cases from amenorrhoea as a cause particularly in those predisposed to pulmonary complaints. He states that no occurrence is more common than cough, pain in the side and difficulty of breathing immediately after obstruction of the menses takes place, these symptoms going off upon the return of that discharge.

If we ask why this does not take place uniformly, we are immediately met by the answer "that when the affection of the lungs has proceeded to a certain extent it will go on independently of its cause, and is no longer to be removed by the restoration of the suppressed evacuation."

Indeed I think when we take into view the particular determination of blood to the lungs in obstruction of the catamenia; producing vicarious tumours &c. from these delicate organs, I think that the opinion

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advanced by Doctor Thearman is not only plausible, but correct.

Are we at a loss to account for these facts when it is well known that a diseased joint is sufficient to excite hectic fever and produce a train of symptoms the most distressing as well as dangerous; when we know that by sympathy or consent of parts, the human system is liable to general disease from local morbid impressions.

Upon the whole I think that it may be fairly concluded that Amenorrhoea is very frequently an idiopathic affection disseminating disease throughout the system by the medium of sympathy.

Hence the very just and appropriate remark of a medical professor whose name has more than once been mentioned in the preceding part of this essay; a remark truly worthy of its author and one which

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desires to be held in perpetual recollection  
viz. "That next to the stomach the uterus  
exerts the widest range of influence  
on the system."

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 10th inst. in relation to the above mentioned matter. I am sorry that I cannot give you a more satisfactory answer at present, but I am sure that I will be able to do so in the future.

Very respectfully,  
 J. M. Smith